

blood in its fire. It will . . . burn away your weakness with its flame, will heal you with its grace."

Matsoukas's attempts to realize his dream comprise the action of the story. But, being Matsoukas, he also takes a side-step to make love to the widow Anthoula ("even her name ravaged his flesh"), who felt that she had died as a woman when her husband died. Here, typically, Petrakis skirts sentimentality with the agility of a tightrope walker. We begin with concern; we finish with wild laughter as, once having turned the widow on, Matsoukas cannot turn her off. The scene in which he literally wrestles with the demon of her husband's memory for possession of Anthoula is a brilliant flight of language—a superb set-piece in its own right.

But the book abounds in marvelous individual scenes. There are a card game and a dice game that carry one from laughter to shock when Matsoukas's desperate need to raise the cash that will get him and Stavros to Greece pushes him to cheat—and to the consequence of discovery. And there is Bishop Zenoitis's hilarious diatribe in Church against that most dread of all modern evils, life insurance, the device that stands between widows and their genuine grief.

Caliope, Matsoukas's magnificently scornful wife; Anthoula, the passionate widow; Cicero, the dealer, who offers his life savings to finance Matsoukas's plan—all are large as life. Yet all pale beside a character like Matsoukas. He is larger than life, a sort of Zorba the Greek-American.

AND here, perhaps, is the only flaw. There is a touch of familiarity in it all. Petrakis has not chosen to travel a new path. Yet, paradoxically, he proves that when you travel in your own style you can make the journey your own. Thus *A Dream of Kings* is essentially a small book. But it is also in many ways a small wonder. Steeped in Hellenisms, full of the richness of a deeply experienced Greco-American life, it is a beautiful tale.

When Camus spoke of the ancient Greeks whom he so admired, he referred to their "virile tenderness." Petrakis, whose first book was nominated for the National Book Award, has had the courage to endow a contemporary character with just that. If it is not too late in the day for wonder, for irony balanced by passion, and above all for "virile tenderness," then I suggest that Leonidas Matsoukas is a good man to get to know as soon as you possibly can.

LITERARY I.Q. ANSWERS

Column One should read: 8, 10, 6, 2, 7, 1, 4, 3, 5, 9. Column Two: 5, 8, 7, 10, 9, 3, 6, 1, 2, 4.

Politics and Patriarchs

All in the Family, by Edwin O'Connor (Little-Brown. 434 pp. \$6.95), a novel about an Irish-Catholic family of wealth and political power, is faintly tinged with reminiscences of the Kennedys. Arthur Darack is book and art editor of the *Cincinnati Enquirer*.

By ARTHUR DARACK

THIS bland, beguiling novel about a powerful Irish Catholic family involved in upper-level politics, does two things: it evokes half-heartedly the radiance of the Kennedys, arousing the appetite (or, if you are a tory, interested distaste), and it tells an old-fashioned tale of familial bickering, triumph, tragedy, and maturation.

The tinnabulation of Boston politics echoes in the distance, sounding like an old hand-wound phonograph that sometimes runs down. But locale is carefully concealed, though *The Last Hurrah* is recalled and the name of Skeffington is bandied about.

All in the Family is patriarchal fiction, and that is its only claim to novelty (in the face of the sociological warning that the U.S. is becoming one vast knuckle-rapping matriarchy, with our fiction dutifully reflecting it). O'Connor's ladies are an unexceptional lot, upper bourgeois by instinct and training if not origin. They know what to wear and say, whose bread is best buttered and on what side. Husbands are not exchanged, with one fleeting exception for which profuse apology is tendered. (More exchange and less apology would have been a better mixture. In fact, since the lady in question exchanges her husband for an unemployed gigolo, the affair seems more like an Unemployment Compensation project than anything else.)

In addition to patriarch Jimmy Kinsella, an old, testy bantam with millions, the family consists of his sons, Charles, the politician, whose introduction to power has intoxicated him and blunted his sense of duty and obligation; James, the renegade, who becomes a cynical, manipulating priest; Phil, an intellectual lawyer with late-appearing moral fixations, and cousin Jack, a writer of mystery fiction, who tells the story. The women, who would never be chronicled by Mary McCarthy, are led by Charles's wife, Marie, who momentarily seems to



Edwin O'Connor — "Faust of American ward politics."

evoke Jacqueline Kennedy. But O'Connor wisely dims the possibility early in the game, and Marie is left to flounder with determination. The only unusual female is the sinner Jean, wife of narrator-novelist Jack. Her affair lasts for two weeks, and at its end she is neither sadder nor wiser, which is all to the good, but neither is she more interesting, which is all to the bad.

Charles winds up in the governor's mansion after a whirlwind campaign which is a family effort, though novelist Jack prefers to remain an observer. But instead of the reform he had promised, Charles enacts bland, neutral legislation which does not stir up the animals, in order to gain more power for his senatorial push. This destroys Kinsella unity, and adds some suspense but not much plausibility.

Jack is interesting chiefly because of his idyllic youth, sentimentally recalled, spent partly in Ireland, which O'Connor details at loving length.

Viewed solely without reference to any known persons or places, *All in the Family* will find a niche in that diversionary class of American novels that are earnest, blandly probing, gently cynical, and nostalgic. Edwin O'Connor is a kind of Faust of American ward politics; he does not truly believe in either the devil or redemption, though he believes in the reality of seduction through all its idioms. Thus drained of its hypostatizing passions, seduction, whether sexual or political, becomes a finger-exercise in the manipulation of people and power.

When Listening Means Life

The Samaritans: To Help Those Tempted to Suicide or Despair, edited by Chad Varah (Macmillan, 248 pp. \$4.95), introduces the organization that sprang up when a London clergyman announced he was available by telephone at any hour to persons who felt driven to self-destruction. Robert J. Levin is articles editor of Redbook magazine.

By ROBERT J. LEVIN

TO LISTEN is to heal; it seems that simple. And yet, of course, it isn't that simple at all. There are different ways of listening to someone who is emotionally distressed, different things to be listening for, different ways of responding to what is heard—and the person who listens wisely will, without knowing quite how it happens, find that this alone is enough to ease much of the misery, the dread, and the despair of the person who talks. Listening, in fact, is in some cases literally a life or death matter; suicide is too often the last soundless scream of a human being who finds himself alone in a world that seems deaf.

On this premise an organization called The Samaritans came into being in England in 1953. At first, however, there was just one man with one telephone and one idea. Chad Varah, the rector of a London church, was upset by the knowledge that every day three people in the city committed suicide. He was well aware that such individuals were generally without friends or family; and, as a clergyman who had always been more interested in counseling than in other parts of parochial work, he wanted to find a way to reach these lonely, despairing people before it was too late. Since the use of the telephone in a physical emergency is virtually reflex action, why not make available a phone number to be dialed in case of an emotional crisis?

With the help of the press, Chad Varah let the public at large know that he could be reached on the telephone at any hour of day or night by anyone "tempted to suicide." The response was immediate and overwhelming. Clearly one man alone could not shoulder the entire burden, and other people stepped forward to help maintain the telephone lifeline. Some were psychiatrists, who assumed responsibility for suicidal "cli-

ents" requiring medical care; others were, like Chad Varah, qualified counselors, who served when needed as therapists.

But what service could be performed by "good-hearted" but professionally unqualified volunteers? The answer evolved out of the situation itself. While Chad Varah interviewed clients in the inner vestry, the volunteers sat around in the outer vestry, talking to people waiting their turn, giving them coffee and cigarettes and making them feel more comfortable. And out of this elementary—and elemental—circumstance, in which one person treated another as a human being, with politeness, with consideration, with genuine interest and concern, three profoundly important and totally unanticipated benefits emerged.

"First, counseling began to go much better," explains Chad Varah in his introductory essay. "Clients were not merely free of the exasperation which comes from long and tedious waiting, but were in a calmly receptive state of mind and had had their confidence in me, as the person doing the counseling, enormously built up. Secondly, a proportion of the clients went away happily without having had any counseling at all, having found all that they needed in the ministrations of the lay volunteers . . . Thirdly, the failures of my counseling were almost always picked up by the volunteers as the client passed through the vestry on the way out."

As a consequence, in 1954 "the original concept of a nonmedical (but still professional) counseling service was abandoned, and its place was taken by the concept of a befriending service by lay volunteers, selected by and operating under the supervision of someone who was capable of supplementing their efforts by counseling the clients or by referring them for treatment when necessary . . ."

Today there are 181 groups in twenty-three countries affiliated with The Samaritans. (In the United States, where 20,000 suicides occur annually, only nineteen cities have affiliated branches, such as Boston's Rescue Inc., Chicago's

Call for Help Clinic, Miami's Friends, Seattle's Crisis Clinic.) These groups have participated in periodic international conferences, and *The Samaritans* consists of twelve of the professional papers given at the conferences, together with an introduction by Chad Varah.

Although most of the material is psychiatrically focused on ways of dealing with individuals who have suicidal inclinations and of differentiating various neurotic and psychotic types of behavior, the book has a wider relevance. For the problems that concern a Samaritan differ in degree but not in kind from the problems we all encounter.

In this sense, *The Samaritans*—and all of us—must master the art of listening. It is an art that requires discipline, because the tendency in dealing with someone who is troubled and asking for help is to talk: to interpret, lecture, give advice, or make decisions. But, as Chad Varah points out, when we hear someone's story of grief and distress and then try to give reassurance, we are in effect reassuring ourselves.

To listen and to care is not an easy matter. In his essay "The Mystique of the Samaritan Method" Dr. Richard Fox, a psychiatric consultant to The Samaritans, notes that "one of the most crucial features in the Samaritan relationship is the acceptance by the befriender of negative, unpleasant features in the client."

The Samaritan's goal is not merely to keep another human being from ending his life. He also wants to befriend the troubled and distressed in such a way that they will "be glad to be alive and be enabled to live 'more abundantly.'" And while an abundant life is not defined, throughout the book there is an emphasis on the importance of sexual fulfillment, expressed by various contributors with candor and conviction.

In an essay on "Befriending the Sexually Frustrated" Chad Varah writes: "Too many people who have high moral standards, high ideals, do seem to give the impression of wanting to find out what other people are doing and to tell them that it is wicked. When clients realize that our concern is that they should live life to the full, that they should have the opportunity to gratify their sexual needs in the wider sense of their need for love, for mutual love and not a mere passing physical spasm, then they take some notice of what we say."

The Samaritan, therefore, can do so much and no more. He can be a friend; he can put another human being back in touch with the world; he can thus make life seem worth living. Beyond that, however, lies the deeper need. As one Samaritan client expressed it: "When Adam was lonely, God didn't create for him ten friends but one wife."

